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SUBJECT: BOYCOTT OVER? OPPOSITION PARTICIPATES IN DEBATE ON IRAQ CONTINGENT

SUMMARY

[¶1.](#) (SBU) Armenian parliamentary opposition members participated in the December 24 National Assembly debates over the dispatch of non-combat troops to Iraq, ending their months-long boycott of the sessions of the parliament. Opposition parties, however, were divided on the decision: while the Justice Bloc strongly opposed sending GOAM troops to Iraq, members of the National Accord faction voted in favor. It is still too early to say whether the opposition's boycott is really completely over. One of the most vocal opposition members, MP Viktor Dallakian, announced that the opposition only participated in the session due to the implications of the decision to dispatch troops to Iraq for the country and the Armenian Diaspora and said that the opposition would continue to boycott the parliament. End Summary.

OPPOSITION ENGAGES IN NA SESSION

[¶2.](#) (SBU) The December 24 extraordinary session of the National Assembly (NA) was unusually long and well attended since the opposition had chosen to suspend their months-long boycott of the parliamentary sessions and engage in the debates over dispatching non-combat Armenian troops to Iraq. Closed-door parliamentary debates continued for more than seven hours, and the vote was technically secret. Opposition parties, however, split on the decision: members of the National Accord (NA) parliamentary faction voted for the dispatch, while MPs from the Justice bloc opposed the decision.

[¶3.](#) (SBU) MPs from the Justice bloc promptly left the session hall immediately after the vote. Opposition MP Artashes Geghamian, along with six other deputies from the National Accord faction, however, stayed for the budget debates and even delivered an emotional speech on possible return of Soviet-era savings' deposits to the population. Opposition members stated several times that their "second coming" to the National Assembly was explained only by the utmost importance for the country and the Armenian Diaspora of the decision to dispatch a non-combat contingent to Iraq; they said that they would continue to boycott the parliament. Nevertheless, the word in Yerevan is that this move may well indicate the final chapter of a boycott that the opposition has been looking for a face-saving way to end. We predict that the opposition will engage -- at least part-time -- in the upcoming spring legislative session as it considers electoral and constitutional reform.

EVANS